DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 189 010 SO 012 708

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TITLE Toward a Futuristic Theory of Education.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 11p.: Paper presented at the Global Conference on the Future (1st, Toronto, Canada, July 20-24, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Needs: *Educational Philosophy: Elementary Secondary Education: *Futures (of Society): *Relevance (Education): *Self Actualization: *Student Needs

ABSTRACT

The paper proposes basic principles and a priority of values as a guide to futuristic thinking about the role of education. The author stresses that education is charged with teaching skills and information necessary for survival, coping with change, and controlling the human life space: socializing the young: and enforcing public policy. Educational philosophy should be evaluated in the light of alternative life styles, increased leisure, the decline of the work ethic, and new concern for the creative imagination. In this light, educational philosophy must be dynamic and evolutionary. Although futures thinkers tend to be a diverse group, certain common areas of agreement relevant to education can be identified: to achieve human survival with maximum realization of potential: accept change for what it is and learn to use it: have faith in the human ability to control the future: use the past but avoid obsolete values and attitudes: not to confine future educational theory only to educational institutions: keep means and ends in perspective: and achieve broadly based, interdisciplinary educational philosophy. In summary, the task of education is to help reconcile the individual to his world and to insure dignity and the maximum realization of the human potential. (Author/KC)

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TOWARD A FUTURISTIC THEORY OF EDUCATION

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It will not be easy for most of us to relinquish to the machine the arts and techniques which have taken us decades to master, and to concentrate on the even more demanding tasks of generalization, synthesis, and judgment which only man can carry out. Perhaps the greatest demands for ingenuity will fall upon the field of education, once it is decided to hand over to other means the mere memorization of information, the computing of sums, and such other routine intellectual tasks as may be found appropriate. It will be an excellent teacher indeed who shows us how to program our school and college experience so as to maximize the capacity to grasp general principles, detect relevance where none was seen before, and to create new conceptual schemes. When that day comes, all education will in a sense be general education, since the technical problems which now divide the specialties will in large part be handed over to the computers, and we will have taught ourselves a language we can all use in common.

--- Robert S. Morison, "New Types of Excellence"

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"To learn is to change. Education is a process that changes the learner."

--- George B. Leonard, EDUCATION AND ECSTASY

With the wide interest in the future of education for which conferences, workshops, courses and the proliferation of literature provide evidence, the question arises, "Does a need exist for a

philosophy of educational futurism?" Since those concerned with shaping or inventing the future represent a wide variety of backgrounds, interests, abilities and values, it appears that some sort of broad conceptual framework upon which a theory of educational futurology might rest is necessary and timely.

It should be obvious that existing systems of educational theory are manifestly inadequate for the task. Indeed, so far as speculative and normative philosophy are concerned, there has been very little recent work applicable to futurism. Available systems consist of the historical record of great thinkers of the past or are based on sets of assumptions not acceptable to most futurists. Many of those who currently do philosophy of education are devoted to using philosophy as a means of clarifying issues and sharpening arguments or to the analyzing of educational concepts and language. Necessary and useful as these activities are, they do little to establish a set of norms or identify the major themes central to a futures approach to education. However risky the effort, it seems imperative to propose some basic principles and a priority of values which might serve to guide futuristic thinking about education. This paper is aimed at that task.

That educators are in a quandary about the direction they should take is not news to anyone familiar with the crisis literature in the field. Unstable social conditions and conflicting values have caused educational issues since the time of Plato but twentieth century conflicts are more intense because of the lack of commonly accepted core values and an easily identified cultural synthesis. Scholars look in vain for enduring structures in modern society while deep cultural arguments create tremendous strain on the moral texture of education.

Today, accelerating change, exponential growth of science and technology, and numerous unresolved problems contributing to human anxiety on a global scale have stretched the educational crisis to the breaking point. The transition from the industrial era into something else (post-industrial society, the age of automation, cybernated/computer culture, the information age, the era of mass communications) demands an educational response on a scale never before imagined. Education is charged not only with teaching skills

and information necessary for survival, coping with change and controlling the human life space, it also is expected to socialize the young and it is used as an instrument for enforcing public policy. Consequently, old standards become increasingly suspect and there is a lack of new criteria by which to judge whether departures from accepted customs and plans of action represent a step forward or merely a weakening of established norms.

Even those longstanding beleifs such as that the school should cultivate intelligence as a tool for problem solving rather than as an end in itself must be evaluated again in the light of alternative life styles, increased leisure, the decline of the work ethic and new concern for the creative imagination of the individual. Yet the absurd notion persists that vitally important cultural issues and their concomitant educational problems may be solved my mere reorganization and the expenditure of enormous sums of money. Beyond question technological improvement is needed and information in the future may become man's most prized possession but information alone furnishes no answers. Whitehead called the merely well-informed man "the most useless bore on God's earth", or as T.S. Eliot put it:

"Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

It is the nature of philosophy to encourage constant re-examination of existing ideas and institutions and to suggest their modification or, if necessary, their elimination. Effective philosophy must be part and parcel of human life and education. It must utilize critical and reflective thought in developing a weltanschauung or world view from which consensus on the most vital issues may be reached. There must be constant experimentation, the testing of hypotheses against experience, re-examination of plans of action in the light of new data and the constant reconstruction of past experience. Such a philosophy is dynamic, evolutionary and never finished. If philosophy fails to achieve a common synthesis, negativeness, disillusionment, apathy, materialism, greed, resource exploitation and individualistic hedonism will prevail. Under such conditions, there is virtually no hope that education can be made the tool of human control over the future or the means of human survival with maximun realization of the human potential.

Assuming a need for an educational theory of futurism has been established, it is necessary to state what is intended by such a philosophy and to indicate how its basic framework might be erected. Futuristic educational theory is not system building. It is not something which can be derived from the assumptions or philosophical premises of idealism, realism, pragmatism or essentialism. It is neither a set of metaphysical assumptions nor the process of applying philosophical tools to already identified problems of education. Certainly no argument (including the one here presented) which will not withstand the test of critical analysis is adequate, but linguistic analysis offers no new directions or guides for the future. It is too narrow because the most important educational issues are not clear and many are emerging rather than existing. It is therefore the thesis of this paper that the best approach to a futuristic educational theory is not speculative or analytic but normative.

If the approach to futuristic educational philosophy is to be that of advocating certain ends, objectives, or values which are regarded as better than others, some common areas of agreement must be identified. There are no limits to futurism. Futures thinkers are found among educators, economists, sociologists, political scientists, biologists, communications theorists and representitives of all the known disciplines. Many, such as R. Buckminister Fuller, are interdisciplinary and no area of learning can be logically excluded from futurism. That future thinking is anything but monolythic can be illustrated by the gap between Herman Kahn and the "Limits to Growth" people. Futurists examine present trends in the culture and attempt to project what these trends might mean in the world of tomorrow. Some, like John McHale, see a new planetary culture the chief characteristics of which are accelerating industrial technology, automation, and a multiplicity of new communications channels to accomodate vastly expanding levels of information. Others, like Donald Michael, are concerned with the ability of man to control cybernation. Still others merely extrapolate from the present in an effort to predict future demographic figures or other statistical data. It seems likely that the interest in the future will continue as will the diversity. But in spite of

differences, the weight of the evidence suggests consensus on several points critical to human survival on the earth and to education. These areas of agreement are not assumptions to be accepted on faith. They are all grounded in evidence which has been tested or is at least potentially verifiable by emperical means. They may be modified or rejected if they fail the test of experience as new data comes to light but they serve as current guides to action. Inventing the future is dependent on human action (but failure to act also influences it) and it is no mere cliche to say that the future is now.

BASIC CONCEPTS

1 HUMAN SURVIVAL WITH MAXIMUM REALIZATION OF POTENTIAL

While there is no ultimate end in a fixed or cosmic sense for futuristic educational theory, the aim of human survival is central. This alone is inadequate unless it is linked with maximum realization of the human potential and the greatest possible opportunity to achieve the good life. The good life, in turn, is one that realizes the greatest value, which implies availability of alternatives, the ability to choose, and the removal of barriers or inhibitions to choice. Schools in the past have often attempted to set arbitrary limits to the definition of the good life. They have often stifled creativity and implied that only the models provided by history or the current social order were viable choices for students. Life styles of the ancient Greek polis, the Indian tribe or the village on the Peruvian plateau and others not yet invented may offer better opportunities for future survival than those of the materialistic, consumer oriented industrial states. It is also necessary to evaluate educational ideas in the light of the whole future of mankind and to avoid the narrow view dictated by proximate ends. As Alec Guiness so well illustrated as the British colonel in THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI, it is very easy to internalize immediate or proximate purposes while losing sight of the overall or ultimate goals which can only be understood by keeping the whole situation in mind. Every educational plan for the future should be required to show that it enhances the chances for survival and the quality of life.

2 ACCEPT CHANGE FOR WHAT IT IS AND LEARN TO USE IT

Futurism is based on the continuation of an accelerating rate of technological change and the constant emergence of new problems in the adaptive non-material culture. The tide cannot be turned and mankind must use technology to serve his needs but this does not require man to be a slave to his machines. "Back to nature" or a revival of the agrarian past may be useful for psychological reasons or for models of life styles which maximize freedom while easing the stress on non-renewable natural resources. But technology is necessary to the solution of most of the great problems and to abandon it would be an act as futile as that of the Luddites who tried to halt industrial growth by smashing machines in 1811. Rapid change and invention are very much a part of our future and education must make them instruments for the identification and resolution of major problems. This is not to say that change for the sake of change is good or that the rate of change is beyond human control. Technology is certainly not valueless and human beings can select the fields in which they wish to stimulate invention as well as those which might be allowed to slow down. Planned educational change is difficult but it can be accomplished. Following World War II the Japanese realized that their future well being depended on slowing down their population growth rate. This required a change of cultural values which was successfully accomplished by using the mass media for informing adults and a deliberate alteration of the school curriculum to include family planning, sex education and personal economics.

3 HAVE FAITH IN THE HUMAN ABILITY TO CONTROL THE FUTURE

The assumption of Sumner and others that human beings are unable to understand and powerless to control their world must be abandoned. Athenians in the fourth century B.C. believed in an intelligible universe but the Greek nerve failed in Hellenistic times and for two thousand years men doubted their own ability to know and manage their environments. Immanuel Kant described the Enlightenment as the process of leaving man's self imposed state of immaturity and proposed the slogan "Aude spere" (Dare to know) as a guide for free people. Daniel Bell holds that there are no <u>inherent</u> secrets in the universe. Quite obviously there is a great deal to learn but

there must be no failure of nerve and no abandonment of reason to fate or to imagined but unknown forces. All too often in the past people beset by obscure difficulties or problems that appeared insurmountable have adopted the "whatever will be will be" attitude. Inventing the educational future requires faith in the capacity of human intelligence to comprehend the world and control its own destiny. It is also well to keep in mind that imagination and intuition are as much a part of the human mind as logic and reason.

4 USE THE PAST BUT AVOID OBSOLETE VALUES AND ATTITUDES

Historians rightly claim that the past is a useful guide to the present and the future but it is important to guard against the uncritical acceptance of past values. The traditional mind set and industrial era attitudes may prevent clarity of perceptions and inhibit the choice of alternatives. A preference for keeping things as they are, rejecting unfamiliar or unknown plans or casting aside all choices that require significant behavioral change is common in human society. The more deeply a value is cherished, the more difficult it is to see it as relative to our own culture, tastes and experience. Parents who are uncomfortable with the world in which their children live often want the schools to recreate the environment they knew when they were students. This rear view mirror approach to the educational future is dangerous and counterproductive. Just as the Puritan work ethic still casts its shadow over modern America, so the values of the future will be shaped by the industrial era unless we prevent it. Following the crowd to materialistic values and situational ethics as fostered by the mass media and advertizing is a powerful force that is far from healthy. Extrapolism from the age of conspicuous consumption is a poor appraoch to the good life and future survival. Theobald has pointed out that except for food, clothing, shelter and a little love, the things we want are not determined by us but by the culture in which we live. Balance is needed to the weight of production, consumption and exploitation. Perhaps it is time to review the humanism of Erasmus, to value the psychology of Maslow and to give scholarly attention to Roszak's MAKING OF A COUNTER CULTURE. It is especially difficult for people engaged in the process of teaching to realize that the values they hold dear are drawn from past experience and may not be relevant for tomorrow.

5 **FUTURE EDUCATIONAL THEORY MUST NOT BE CONFINED TO SCHOOLING**

Most of the theoretical literature in education deals with teaching and learning in institutions called schools. It is quite possible that schools will be significant in the future but alternative means of education will surely increase in importance too. Problem solving/resource distribution centers, life-long learning, community education centers, universities without walls, the mass media, learning webs, home based computer assisted instruction and prenatal training are already in use. The work of Illich and other critics who call for deschooling society must be seriously studied. Too many educational philosophers have taken a narrow and myopic view centered upon the American public school rather than on the whole of education. Some futurists suggest that all human beings will spend most of their lives in some kind of teaching and learning activities by the year 2,000.

In many parts of the world, basic adult education cannot be accomplished by schools because they do not exist and the means for their establishment is lacking. Some form of educatation utilizing mass media or a special system of electronic communications seems the most promising solution. Even in the highly technical culture of the United States, media and especially the medium of television plays a major educational role. Some of the most provocative philosophical questions to face this age and the future have been formulated by theorists interested in the impact of electronic media and computer technology on the culture. Marshall McLuhan suggests that the perceptions of children exposed to television are improved so that causal connections and subtle relationships are understood as never before. The question of whether a "canned" culture stored in memory banks and television tapes will have the same iconic value as permanent and unique objects in the "real" world is treated by John McHale in "The Plastic Parthenon." A philosophy for the future of education must be as broad as education itself and not confined to schools alone.

6 **MEANS AND ENDS MUST BE KEPT IN PERSPECTIVE**

There is a strong tendency for futures authors, especially science fiction writers and utopian novelists, to suggest desirable goals without saying how these goals might be achieved. John Dewey gave a great deal of thought to his argument that means and ends cannot be separated and that the ends do not justify the means. Goals,

ends or aims in future education should be evaluated not only on the basis of desirability but also on the criterion of the possibilities for implementation. The social reconstructionism of Theodore Brameld postulates using the schools as an instrument of social change and calls for a new world social order. The weakness of the theory is that no means for its realization have yet been identified. It is not suggested that desired and needed ends be given up merely because the means have not been found but only that means and ends be given equal attention. Drastic action, major alteration of institutions and systems, innovative learning programs and alternate life styles may be required in the future. But nothing is ever done in a vacuum and what is involved in getting from here to there is just as important as the goal identified as "there'"

7 FUTURE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY MUST BE BROADLY BASED

The future will not be understood by looking at a narrow slice of life or learning. However important specialization may remain, the task of understanding and analyzing the forces which shape man and his world must have the broadest possible base. Futurism is interdisciplinary. McLuhan has attacked the "fragmented unrelation" of industrial era school curricula and pointed out that any subject studied in depth immediately relates to other subjects. Leonard has called for an educational experience as wide as life itself and one that does not ignore creativity, aesthetics or ecstasy. Ecology stress the symbiotic relationship of many plants and animals; Brown has demonstrated that virtually all the major human problems are global; Theobald may be justly called a socio-ecomomist-educator; Fuller uses the term synergy to show that combined action is necessary in almost all aspects of life. If futurism is comprehensive, interrelated and synergetic, it follows that a theory of futuristic education must be the same. Theories about how human beings behave come from psychology, anthropology and the other social sciences. Theories about how they <u>ought</u> to behave come from axiology and are therefore philosophic. But Axiology, ethics and aesthetics are too important to be left to philosophers alone. Marx, Myrdal, Boulding, Toffler, Platt, Coleman, Skinner, Lilly and Illich are names just as relevant to futuristic educational philosophy as are Dewey, Whitehead, Hutchins, Buber and Ryle. Unless futurism remains synergetic, open, interdisciplinary and oriented toward a cultural synthesis, it will become just another academic discipline to be studied in the ivory towers of universities.

The points which have been made are necessarily general. Building a philosophy of educational futurism is a difficult task which will require the concentrated efforts of the best human minds. But education is one of the best tools we have for inventing and controlling the future. It is the task of a philosophy of educational futurism to discover those principles which will help reconcile the individual to his world and to insure survival with dignity and the maximum realization of the human potential.

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